



# BRINGING HEAVEN TO EARTH

SERIES: THE RESTORATION OF MANKIND

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Ephesians 5:15-21  
Sixteenth Message  
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*"Our Father who art in Heaven,  
Hallowed be Thy name,  
Thy kingdom come  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven."*

All Christians are familiar with this prayer uttered by Jesus in response to his disciples' request, "Lord, teach us to pray." Jesus prayed to his Father, who is holy, and lives in heaven, asking that his holy will be done on earth as it was in heaven. But the question arises, "How do we bring God's holy will from heaven to earth?" especially when we live in increasingly evil days? Do we accomplish God's will on earth through politics or protest, by the sword of coercion or through economic means?

The Christians of Ephesus during the first century A.D. longed to bring God's holiness to earth. But they had none of the usual trappings of power to effect change. They had no political clout, financial resources or legal status. And they certainly did not own any buildings like the magnificent temple of Artemis, located on the outskirts of the city, which drew people from all over the world to sample its sensuous pleasures. How could they bring heaven to earth? Given their circumstances, they probably wrestled with the deeper question: Was it even possible to bring heaven to earth, or were the words "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," merely a divine joke?

Any well taught Jew in Ephesus, of course, would say that heaven was real; it was no joke. Heaven had a history of coming to earth, he would say. Hadn't God walked with Adam in the cool of the day, communicating with him when the evening breezes wafted through the Garden of Eden? Following the loss of paradise, the great redeemer God had even recreated heaven on earth on a grander scale in the land of Israel, a land "flowing with milk and honey."

In Deuteronomy, Moses declared that Israel was a land quite different from Egypt. For one thing, Egypt garnered water by pumping it from the earth, but Israel depended on rain from heaven to make the land fertile. Here is how Moses described the land: "The land which you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the *rain from heaven*, a land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (Deut. 11:10-12).

Furthermore, our well-taught Jew would say that the rain that watered the land was controlled by the wind. Thus Israel was absolutely dependent on the wind patterns to provide rain. This dependence on the winds of heaven was most keenly felt during the Jewish feast of Shevuot, the Day of Pentecost. The Jews were to count 50 days from Passover to First Fruits (which the rabbis called seven weeks of trepidation and prayer), and watch and pray for the winds to do their work. Nogah Hareuveni, in his book, *Nature In Our Biblical Heritage* (Neot Kedumim, Israel, 1980), describes their prayers: "Let the northern wind come during the first weeks after Passover, thus giving wheat and barley a chance to fill with starch, leaving the olive buds closed. Let the dry southern wind come only after the grain kernels have filled and the stalks hardened, but let it prevail until the flowers of the olive, grape and date and pomegranate have been pollinated" (p. 37).

It is the wind that brings heaven to earth! And it is no coinci-

dence that in both Hebrew and Greek, the word "wind" is the same word used for God's Spirit. Some 30 years before Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians, on the Feast of Shevuot, the very occasion when Jews were bringing to the temple the first fruits of the grain, oil and wine (produce that depended on the interplay of the southern and northern winds), a mighty wind had blown through the place and Jesus' disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. This event, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit without measure, marked the inauguration of the last days. Heaven had pulled off the grandest invasion of earth. From that time forward, heaven would not be confined to a garden or to one nation; heaven had come to invade the entire earth. So the Ephesian Christians were to respond to their decadent culture, not by trying to compete with Artemis worship on worldly terms but, according to the apostle Paul's letter to the church in that city, they were to cultivate spirituality through the power of God's Holy Spirit which had been poured out on them. As the prophet Zechariah wrote, "Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord" (Zech. 4:6). The Spirit would bring the forces of heaven to earth and create a new community that would outlast not just the temple of Artemis, but history itself.

In a mere seven verses from chapter 5 of his letter now, the apostle holds forth perhaps the most beautiful cameo of Christian spirituality ever composed. We could well entitle these verses, "How To Bring Heaven To Earth." Ephesians 5:15-21:

**Therefore watch carefully how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.**

The first thing we will consider from our text is the goal of spirituality.

## I. The Goal of Spirituality: Redemption (5:15-16)

**Therefore watch carefully how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.**

### (a) The Necessity for Redemption: The Days Are Evil

Surrounded as they were by the cult of Artemis, the Ephesian Christians were living in chaotic, evil times. Eugene Peterson described the conditions which they labored under in these words: "In the ancient world each day of the week was assigned to the care of a god or goddess. Each divinity made its own capricious demands and dispensed good or ill arbitrarily. The pagan deities were at odds with each other, bickering and quarreling. The week was a hodgepodge of scheming and intrigue. The Christian, in contrast, discovered all time to be under the lordship of Christ. Time is redeemed."

Despite the evil of the times, true spirituality turns Christians into involved citizens, not reclusive monks. In Christ, God has empowered Christians to "buy back" the time normally used to accomplish evil and use it instead for good.

## **(b) The Nature of Redemption: Seasonal**

Secondly, wise persons know that all time is not alike. The word Paul uses for time is *kairos*, meaning “season.” Time has a seasonal quality about it. For example, there are different times for sowing, watering, growing, and reaping. Spiritual people don’t act like high-powered managers who impose their agendas from the top down. Christians act like wise farmers. They are sensitive to existing conditions and they take careful advantage of seasonal windows of opportunity lest those moments be lost.

Jesus was a wonderful example of this very thing. One day in Samaria, for instance, he met a woman who was drawing water from a well. To the casual observer, everything in the scene would seem to be out of kilter. Here was a Samaritan, a woman, by herself, drawing water, at the wrong time of day. The disciples reckoned it was lunch time, so they went off to buy food, but not Jesus. Ever spiritually perceptive, he recognized that someone had sown spiritual seeds with this woman before he came along. The first fruits were present, the buds of heaven were beginning to blossom, and his task was merely to water; then the harvest would be ready. Following their encounter and certain things he said to her, the woman returned to her village with news of what Jesus had said and soon the whole place came out to see and hear this man who had told her everything she had ever done. Later, when the returning disciples questioned his timing, Jesus told them: “Do not say, ‘There are yet four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the field, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together” (John 4:35-36). Jesus had recognized a spiritual opportunity. It was the right season to act, and he acted.

The goal of spirituality is not to make Christians into reclusive monks or high powered managers, but observant farmers who are sensitive to the conditions that will bring forth a harvest of redemption.

So in these verses we have the goal of spirituality.

The obvious question now is, how do we cultivate spirituality? And where do we begin?

## **II. Cultivating Spirituality (5:17)**

**So then do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is.**

### **(a) Stop Playing the Fool**

“Don’t be foolish,” says Paul, “start using your mind.” By “foolish” here he means careless. The word speaks of making choices on impulse alone without regard for the consequences. Some people think it is the very height of spirituality to allow their natural impulses to take over without first utilizing their minds. If this is how we act, however, we will end up playing the part of the fool rather than the part of the Spirit-led Christian.

### **(b) Start Using Your Mind**

On the contrary, says Paul, Christians should “understand what the will of the Lord is.” “Understand” means we use our abilities to get to the bottom of something, bringing all of our observations together so we can see the whole. If we do this, our actions will be based not a momentary urge, but after careful perception, having considered the full weight of evidence.

So the first priority of spiritual people is not to act, but to be quiet and reflective. Truly spiritual people have a certain humility about them. They recognize they don’t have the full picture, so they carve out time to retreat with God to think, listen, read, pray, meditate, memorize, and reflect. This was what Jesus did, wasn’t it? In Capernaum, despite the great ministry of healing which he had accomplished, and the numbers who were still awaiting a touch from his healing hand, Mark reports: “And in the early morning, while it was still dark, [Jesus] arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there.” Then he said to Peter, who had sought him out, “Let us go somewhere

else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for” (Mark 1:35, 38). Even the Messiah himself knew that he had to spend time alone with the Father so that he could reorder his priorities.

Heaven seldom comes to earth, not because Christians lack zeal, but because we lack perception. Our thinking is carnal, shallow, and often premature. Only you know when you’re at your best, so make the best use of that time and give it to God in prayer, meditation and reading. I have learned that I am at my sharpest at the beginning of my day, thus I like to read a psalm and then selected spiritual writings early in the morning, before I begin my work day.

So spiritual people have sanctified minds. They discipline themselves to read and meditate before they act.

Having addressed the mind, the apostle now goes on to address the will.

## **III. The Imperative of Spirituality (5:18)**

**And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,**

### **(a) Do Not Get Drunk**

In Ephesus, drunkenness and loss of control was considered the height of religious activity in the cult of Artemis. Yet, as Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once pointed out, alcohol and drugs do not stimulate the mind, they depress it: “Alcohol...depresses first and foremost the highest centers of all in the brain...that control everything that gives a man self-control, wisdom, understanding, discrimination, judgment, balance, the power to assess everything; in other words everything that makes a man behave at his very best and highest.”

The truly spiritual person is the one who is in full control of his behavior, perhaps for the first time in his life.

### **(b) Be Filled with the Spirit**

The words “be filled” are a present imperative. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on believers and they were commanded to be continually filled by the Spirit. This is not an option, but something that is to be continually practiced by and expected from every Christian.

I want to point out that “being filled” is not referring to filling up (as if we need more of the Holy Spirit), but being filled out, in the way that a choir fills out an auditorium when it sings. This command to be filled with the Spirit is not referring to our getting more of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit getting more of us! In the book of Acts there is a good illustration of what the word means. There it was used by the high priest in Jerusalem to accuse the apostles of filling the city with the teachings of Christ: “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have *filled* Jerusalem with your teaching” (Acts 5:28).

So it is the task of Christians to go into all the world as God’s instruments to bring the whole world under his dominion, that he might fill all in all.

Thus we see that spirituality is available to us, and that it is not an option, but an imperative.

How then do Christians express spirituality in their everyday lives? In the closing verses of this section, Paul gives four participles to instruct us.

## **IV. Expressions of Spirituality (5:19-21)**

**...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.**

Notice first that three of the participles are active and expressive: speaking, singing, and thanking. Spiritual people are ex-

pressive people. The Holy Spirit animates, enlivens, and stimulates his people. Truly spiritual people, therefore, can't be dull and introverted.

Neither can they be loners or recluses (note the twice-expressed phrase, *one another*). Spiritual life is expressed in community, and spiritual people must be committed to community. This may take the form of a Bible study, a home fellowship, gathering together over breakfast, whatever. Spiritually-minded people will seek out an arena where they can express themselves.

We come now to the four particples.

#### (a) Speaking

**Be filled with the spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.**

The spiritual person speaks in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, says Paul. The Book of Psalms, of course, is the school of prayer. If we lack freedom in our prayers, perhaps it is because we have not studied the psalms.

Written by the kings of Israel (fully half of them by King David), the psalms are an expression of the rule of God upon earth. Following his anointing as king of Israel, David had to flee to the wilderness to escape Saul who had all the power of the state, the military, the official priesthood, etc., at his beck and call. Prayer was all that was left to David. Hiding from his adversary in remote and primitive locations like Engedi, or the cave of Adullam, David wrote the psalms and through them introduced the kingdom of heaven to earth, resulting in the defeat of Saul.

The spiritual value of the psalms was evident in the Jewish tradition where almost every older Jew had memorized the Hebrew Psalter. We note also that the psalms became the most quoted Old Testament book in New Testament. Then in the history of the church, the Sixth Council of Chalcedon decreed that all candidates for ordination had to memorize the psalms of David. So filled are the psalms with inspiration and spiritual depth that Jesus himself used them as his prayer book. He is the ultimate King for whom the book was designed. When you pray the psalms, therefore, you are praying the very prayers of Jesus. You enter into his laments, his thanksgivings and his praise, and you will feel caught up into heaven. But Christians go one step further. The psalms were the prayers of David and Christ, as we have seen; and now, according to the NT, Christians are "in Christ," so the prayers of the Messiah actually become our prayers and our experience.

In the magnificent OT story of Jonathan and David, Jonathan placed himself between his friend David and the wicked Saul, taking the spear for David, in effect. (Psalm 27 describes how David was saved and protected and how he sang songs of praise in his tent.) David's escapes from the pursuing Saul took on new meaning for me personally when I was ministering in Romania a few years ago. The secret police, the Securitate, discovered that I was visiting a certain house and they surrounded it. I escaped and, safely outside the village, I read Psalm 27. I was struck by the fact that David's experience became Christ's, and it had now become my own. And incredibly, the Romanian brother who stood between me and the police was named Jonathan! Later that week, while I was camping in the hills, the police came three more times, but three more men, each of them named Jonathan, put their own security on the line in order to save me. I was moved to tears when I realized that I was part of holy history and I had personally entered into the psalms.

My exhortation is obvious: School yourselves in the psalms! Read a psalm at the dinner table. Read one before bed. If you do, you will learn to pray and you will learn to speak. And when your speech is informed by the psalms, through it you will be participating in bringing heaven to earth everywhere you go.

#### (b) Singing

**...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;**

It is not enough that we should speak and pray, however, we must also sing. The psalms erupt into melodious songs that resonate into the soul, for all true spirituality affects the emotions. Eugene Peterson has an excellent word for us in this respect: "There are songs everywhere in Scripture. The people of God sing...Songs proliferate. Hymns gather the voices of men, women, and children into century-tiered choirs. Moses sings. Miriam sings. Deborah sings. David sings. Mary sings. Angels sing. Jesus and his disciples sing. Paul and Silas sing. When persons of faith become aware of who God is and what he does, they sing. The songs are irrepressible."

And what should we sing? Here is where congregations divide. Some people like the old hymns, but some like to sing only the new. But notice what Paul says. We should always start with the old. All of our singing is to be schooled by the psalms; then we can move on to the great hymns of the church, and then the new songs. Every service should have a blend of these three. Deep emotions are born out of rich theology, so let us write new songs, but only after we have been schooled in the psalms. When I listen to and participate in these three categories, I find that the worship experience transports me, as if I were in Elijah's chariot, to heaven itself. There, under the throne of God, Christians can find themselves in company with all the saints of all time — our loved ones, the prophets, the angels. This is what the book of Hebrews is describing in these words: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:22-23).

I have shared with you how affected I have been by the deep spirituality of our brothers and sisters of the Lord's Army in Romania. They sing the hymns of Traian Dorz, a man who composed 10,000 hymns while serving 16 years in prison for his faith. I will never forget singing with them on the hillsides of Romania. It was as if they had left behind the earth and all their suffering and ascended to the throne of God. There they wept for the joy of the intimacy they were sharing with Christ. Afterwards they became quiet and reflective. How shallow is our own Christianity, I thought. We are used to having our emotions titillated, but we seldom enter a theology of suffering and true worship. In Romania, because Christians had been schooled first in the psalms of David, they were able to write their own hymns of worship, hymns that had been crafted in the cell of suffering.

Music is critically important to assist you in worship. If your children have any musical ability, therefore, cultivate it. Spend money on music lessons for them, for instance. When my daughter Becki plays the piano at home, I feel transported out of the routine and the mundane and I enter into heaven. What do you do when you are caught in traffic? I have a suggestion for you: sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs! Your car can become your heavenly chariot as you worship the Lord.

#### (c) Thanking

**giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;**

The psalms of thanksgiving were composed to publicly acknowledge that God had saved his king. In song we express our appreciation to God, and we give freedom to our highest emotions. We are acknowledging that he is in control of circumstances, and that it is well with our souls. I even make it a practice with the men and women I work with to have them write their own psalms of appreciation based on their experiences. I do this because heaven comes to earth when we appreciate the work of God.

Spiritually-minded people who show their appreciation for God in all circumstances are imbued with the fear of Christ. My wife and I spent time last week with Brenda and Marty Mathiesen, a couple who are going through a severe crisis of suffering, yet their entire demeanor is one of appreciation to God. We felt the love of Christ as we talked together of how much they appre-

ciated the Lord, their marriage and their family. This is the very height of spirituality.

Now the fourth participle.

**(d) Submitting**

**and being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.**

Singing

Speaking

Thanking

Thinking

Submitting

If we put these participles in order we can observe a certain rhythm in the expression of our spirituality. It should begin with thinking, with having our minds renewed; thus we should be quiet and receptive. Next there is speaking, and all of our speech is informed by the Scriptures. Then we reach highest emotional expression, which is singing. We follow this by a quiet time of thanksgiving and appreciation. All of these activities then are climaxed by submitting. Thus we end where we began, in a receptive mode, humbly receiving the life of Christ from others in community.

This spirit of submitting is the highest expression of Christian spirituality. Notice the good news that bringing heaven to earth does not depend on getting our way or controlling others. In *The Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster wrote, "The obsession to demand that things go the way we want them to go is one of the greatest bondages in human society...In submission we are at last free to value other people. Their dreams and plans become important to us. We have entered into a new, wonderful, glorious freedom—the freedom to give up our own rights for the good of others...Our happiness is not dependent upon getting what we want."

So important is this matter of submitting that Paul devotes the next chapter of this letter to work this out in every arena: first, the home; then in relationships between husbands and wives, fathers and children, and work-place slaves and masters. Heaven is designed to invade every sphere you enter.

I have a helpful suggestion here for you. When you want to feed your souls with the great spiritual works, turn to the writers who did not get their own way. Paul's epistles were written while he was in prison. John's Apocalypse was written while he was in exile. David's psalms were forged in the wilderness. Solzhenitsyn's writings were birthed in a cruel Communist gulag. Spirituality is birthed when man does not get his own way. Writing about this in *The Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn said:

Leo Tolstoi was right when he dreamed of being put in prison. At a certain moment that giant began to dry up. He actually needed prison as a drought needs a shower of rain! All the writers who wrote about prison but who did not themselves serve time there considered it their duty to express sympathy for prisoners and to curse prison. I...have served enough time there. I nourished my soul there, and I say without hesitation: "Bless you prison, for having been my life."

Following Pentecost, heaven can't be confined to any geographical location, nor can its rule be opposed. Try and shut it out by force or decree and it will invade the darkest cell, enlighten the simplest mind, and strengthen the weakest body.

There are many people in this congregation who have taught me much about spirituality through their beautiful spirit of submission in difficult circumstances. I would like to dedicate this service to Art David, a man who brought heaven to earth for me as he lay dying of cancer. I will close by reading a poem I wrote in appreciation of him.

HE LEADETH ME

It is written in Thy book  
That You lead your sheep  
To still waters of rest,  
And we ought fear no evil,  
For You are with us.

I heard these words,  
But as I walked  
In the valley of deep darkness  
I mused upon them.

What are these thoughts of the ancient king?  
Well driven nails  
Given by one Shepherd,  
Or mere dreams that vanish like smoke?

Then I came across a precious lamb  
Who I found long ago lost in the wilderness.  
I rejoiced then, laid him on my shoulders  
And brought him home to the fold of God.

Now the lamb lay limp, bleeding,  
Its limbs broken by wolves.  
The shepherd wept.

"Weep not for me,  
For the Lord is my shepherd  
And He leads me through the valley.  
I fear no evil for He is with me."

"Though He crush me  
Yet I will trust in Him,  
For He crushes me  
That I may love Him."

O Art, I watched you  
As He carried you on His pinions  
And made you ride  
On the heights of the earth.

He made your soul  
Like a well watered garden,  
And like a spring of water  
Whose waters do not fail.

His love brightened your eyes,  
His Word loosed your tongue,  
His light made your face radiant,  
The fragrance filled the whole garden.

What faith this is,  
Pure unalloyed faith,  
That reigns in heaven,  
For all the humble of earth.

Now we know the words of king David  
Are true: there is a heaven!  
We have seen it  
In the radiant face of Art David.

On this day,  
The sheep became the shepherd  
To show us The Way  
Through the valley of death...  
To the garden of God.

*"Lead me in the everlasting way."*

In Appreciation to God for the life of Arthur Lloyd David,  
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